

# Gendered Bodies

## Week 2: Feminist Thoughts on Bodies

# A History of Women's Bodies

(Rose Weitz)

- Three ideas of women's bodies recur in western history
  - Women's bodies are mentally and physically inferior to men's
  - Societies have considered women's bodies as men's property
  - Societies have assumed that women's bodies inherently turn them into sexual seductresses who threaten men's bodies and souls

# A History of Women's Bodies

(Rose Weitz)

- These ideas about women's bodies have been applied in different ways depending on women's
  - Social class
  - Ethnicity
  - Race
  - Religious group

# A History of Women's Bodies

(Rose Weitz)

- **Circa 1800 B.C.**
  - › The Code of Hammurabi-the earliest recorded legal system in the western world-defines women's bodies as men's property
  - › rape is considered a property crime and the rapist must pay a fine for property damage to either the husband or the father
- **4th century B.C.**
  - › The Greek philosopher Aristotle argues that embryos become female only if they have insufficient "heat" to become fully human. Thus all females are "misbegotten men" and "monstrosities."
  - › Other Greek scholars extend these ideas, declaring that lack of heat makes women smaller, frailer, less intelligent, emotionally weak, morally suspect, and, as a result, a danger to men.

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    - less intelligent,
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    - a danger to men.
- **Early Christian era**
  - › Like the Greeks early Christian philosophers conclude that women's presumed moral weaknesses endanger any men who come under their spell.
  - › Eve succumbed to the snake's tempting and caused the fall from divine grace because women's nature makes them inherently more susceptible to sexual desire and other passions of the flesh, blinding them to reason and morality and making them a constant danger to men's souls.

# A History of Women's Bodies

(Rose Weitz)

- **14th to 18th centuries**
  - › The Christian belief that women are
    - less intelligent than men,
    - more driven by sexual passions,
    - more susceptible to the Devil's influence
  - › These beliefs led to killings of tens of thousands of innocent women accused of witchcraft in Europe and America.

# A History of Women's Bodies

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- **17th century**
  - Slavery takes root in colonial North America. Both the law and scientists regard African-American women (and men) as less-than-human property.
  - the rape of African-American women slaves by their white masters becomes an accepted practice, justified by ideologies that
    - African-American women animalistically over-sexed temptresses.

# A History of Women's Bodies

(Rose Weitz)

- **Late 19th to early 20th century**
  - Beliefs about women's physical and emotional frailty are widely used as justifications for restricting women's rights to vote, get an education, or hold professional jobs.
  - Many educators argued that higher education will make women
    - ▢ frigid,
    - ▢ drain them of their beauty and health,
    - ▢ prevent their pelvises from developing fully, causing women to suffer or even die in childbirth. To "treat" women who become rebellious or depressed due to their constricted roles, doctors surgically remove their ovaries, uteruses, and clitorises in highly dangerous operations.
  - Meanwhile, the same scientific "experts" who lament the frailty of middle- and upper-class white women proclaim the robustness of the poorer women - both white and non-white - who must perform hard manual labor in fields, factories, and households.

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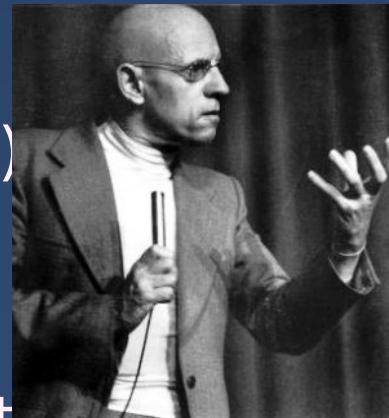
(Rose Weitz)

- More recently – (second & third waves of feminism)
  - Marital rape
  - Partner abuse
  - Sexual violence against women
  - Fetal rights vs. women's right to control their bodies
- Canadian examples related to race
  - Residential schools (both girls & boys)
  - Africville

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee Bartky)

- Michel Foucault was a French philosopher
- He wrote about
  - History of ideas (sexuality)
  - Discourse - productive
  - Complex theory of power
  - Discipline and punishment
- <http://www.michel-foucault.com/index.htm>
- Foucault argued that in modern society we see a rise in parliamentary institutions and we see a new unprecedented discipline directed at the body



# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee Bartky)

- According to Foucault
  - Disciplinary practices are tied to modern forms of the
    - Army
    - School
    - Hospital
    - Prison
  - ‘Docile bodies’ (manageable, obedient bodies) are produced through discipline
  - Micro-physics of power that partitions the body’s time, space and movement

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's design of the panopticon to capture the essence of the disciplinary society



# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee Bartky)

- The effect of the panopticon is to induce a state of consciousness in the inmate of permanent visibility - the sense that they are always being watched
- This state causes the inmate to watch their every behaviour - so even if the guard in the watchtower is looking at someone else the inmate polices their own behaviour.
- Voila - the inmate becomes their own jailer

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Bartky argues that Foucault treats the body as one – he ignores the differing bodily experiences of men and women.
- She asks “where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the ‘docile bodies’ of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men?”

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Bartky considers several disciplinary practices that engender the bodies of women
  - Female figure
    - Diet
    - Wrinkles
  - Motility
    - Women literally take up less space than men
    - Posture
    - smiles

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Disciplinary practices of women's bodies
  - Ornamented surface
    - Skin & skin products
    - Hair removal
    - Disciplinary devices (blow dryer, curling iron, hot curlers etc.)
- Bartky argues that the beautiful / sexy body gains women attention but not respect or power

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Bartky asks – who are the disciplinarians in this regime / system of femininity?
  - The disciplinary power that inscribes the female body is everywhere and nowhere – the disciplinarian is everyone but really no one in particular
- There are sanctions when women do not discipline their bodies
  - Loss of male attention and intimacy
  - Don't feel like their bodies are feminine or are sexually desired

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Bartky compares the ‘male gaze’ to that of the guard in the watchtower of the panopticon
- The gaze becomes internalized and like the inmate, women become self-policing and participate in disciplinary practices of body willingly – power has become invisible

# Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power

(Sandra Lee  
Bartky)

- Bartky concludes that self-surveillance is
  - › a form of obedience to patriarchy
  - › A state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power
- Women can resist
  - › Choose to perform femininity in different ways